

October 14, 2005

**“Stopping the Methamphetamine Epidemic:
Lessons from the Pacific Northwest”**

Written Statement for the Record

**Prepared by Sheriff John Trumbo for the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice,
Drug Policy and Human Resources**

Chairman Souder, Congressman Walden, and distinguished members of the panel, I’m John Trumbo, Sheriff of Umatilla County in the State of Oregon. I have 33 years of law enforcement experience, the last nine as Sheriff. I am currently a member of the Governor’s Methamphetamine Task Force, and a Board Member of the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team.

Will Rogers once said, “If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.” I’m here today to tell you we are in a hole, however, we’d better not stop digging. I feel that methamphetamine production and its use, has created a large hole in what we previously have known as the safety and security of our homes, families and the communities we live in. I suspect that in most cases Will Rogers is correct, but in this case we are in a hole that we’d better keep fighting to get out of.

As adults we recognize that all things fall into two categories: needs and wants. Our wants can be tabled until extra time and money are available. Our human NEEDS, the physical, mental and moral necessities of survival cannot wait for available time and money. This is why we are here today, our human needs, need to be met now. Hopefully at the conclusion of today’s activities, you will have a better understanding of this menace called meth and the direct and indirect affect it is having on our lives today.

The use and abuse of methamphetamine affects more than just the abuser. The indirect costs to our citizens are even greater than the direct costs. Abusers must burglarize and steal items, including your identity, to support their habits. When a citizen

becomes the victim, law enforcement steps in to investigate the crime. The case may be solved, however, many times the victim may not get their property returned. In the case of identity theft, the victim's credit rating may suffer.

When the suspect is arrested, they will be lodged in jail. Normally the defendant will receive a court appointed attorney. The District Attorney's Office will be required to prosecute the offender. A trial will be held to determine guilt or innocence. If found guilty, the offender is incarcerated in a State operated correctional facility for a prescribed period of time, or placed on supervised probation. Many offenders have families that require state assistance to cover food, housing and medical care. A portion of the costs associated from the original complaint until such time as the offender is released from supervised custody must be covered by the original victim. With this scenario, the victim becomes an unwilling victim again.

Insurance companies are also indirect victims of meth abuse. When a claimant suffers a loss, the insurance company steps in to cover the financial loss. At some point, those costs are seen as higher insurance rates. The original victim may become a victim for the third time.

I believe local law enforcement in Oregon needs four things from our Federal Government. 1) Restrictive and enforceable laws for meth production and use. This would include, but is not limited to, severely restricting the importation of pseudoephedrine and pseudoephedrine based products from outside of the United States and establishing uniformity with every state in the dispensing of pseudoephedrine based products.

2) Financial support in order to carry out our public safety mission. HIDTA grants are very much appreciated and will certainly go a long way towards fighting the war on drugs. Locally we also depend heavily on Byrne grant funds. The Byrne grant fund program must be renewed as well as serious consideration be given to increasing individual awards.

Additional resources must be made available for treatment services so we can break the cycle of addiction. Law enforcement does not have the resources to continually

deal with the same individuals on the same drug related issues. In many instances even those individuals who no longer are involved in the illegal drug culture suffer from mental illness that was brought on by their previous activities. In many cases, law enforcement personnel are not trained to a sufficient degree to deal with the mentally ill person. Nor do we have the resources to wait with a mentally ill subject until a trained mental health professional can conduct an evaluation and take appropriate action.

3) A more active role from The Drug Enforcement Administration in the local war on drugs. Illegal drug activity has no geographical boundaries and an occasional appearance from a DEA agent is not sufficient to successfully track the larger suppliers of methamphetamine. An active DEA presence will also allow us to develop cases that will be prosecuted in federal court.

4) Eastern Oregon needs a minimum of a half time U.S. Attorney and preferably a full time prosecutor. The United States Attorney's Office in Oregon is aggressively attacking the meth problem by prosecuting violations of federal laws. They're willingness to prosecute violations of federal drug laws as well as related crimes, is only tempered by their inability to do so adequately because of inadequate financial support. For the most part, a violation of federal law has consequences that are much more severe than the State of Oregon provides. Locally, people in the drug culture are not naive to our inability to punish violations of Oregon laws as prescribed by state statute. We need to send a clear and convincing message to those who choose to continue with their illegal behavior. There is an end of the road, a federal prison if you violate a federal law.

This menace called meth is slowly destroying our quality of life. The cure is not cheap or painless. The solutions to the problem will no doubt be unpopular with some citizens who are not directly affected. We are in a crisis, our law makers in Washington D.C. must provide leadership and financial assistance. They must pass laws that directly address the issues. Officials at all levels must understand that what is affecting us in the rural areas is the same blight that is affecting the urban areas of the United States. As we say in North Eastern Oregon, it's time to "Cowboy Up".